

*Building Use Recommendations Report
Prepared for Westford
Board of Selectmen*

By Permanent Town Building Committee:

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June 28, 2005

I. Introduction

In August of 2004 the Permanent Town Building Committee (PTBC) presented the Board of Selectmen (BOS) a report which outlined Westford's current departments and their needs. This report follows the previous report and details recommendations in completion of PTBC's assigned task to recommend a low cost solution to Westford's space needs utilizing existing vacant or soon to be vacant buildings as identified by the BOS. The PTBC has, at this time, sought a no build solution by utilizing available resources.

We interviewed all town departments except Police, Highway, Water, Rodenbush C.C. and Cemetery to determine:

- ✓ Number of employees
- ✓ Workspace needs
- ✓ Building needs (if any)
- ✓ Storage needs

We were asked to consider the former Water building, the current Highway building, the Millennium School, the Graniteville Fire Station, and the Town Farm building and visited each to determine possible types of use.

We have based our following recommendations on the most cost effective and feasible implementation, after considering cost, longevity, space requirements, functionality, and employee response. We regret that it is not possible to satisfy all department requests; there is more need than current available space.

II. Recommendations

Based on 1-5 years:

- 1- Relocate Building Services Department from Town Hall to Millennium School
 - The Building Services Department consists of approximately 15 full time employees and requires 4500-5500 square feet of space (including file storage and conference rooms). Building Services includes Planning (1.0 FTE), Board of Health (5.5 FTE), Conservation Commission (1.0 FTE), Building Inspector (6.5 FTE), Board of Appeals (0 FTE), GIS (1.0 FTE).
 - Building Services is currently located on the second floor of the Town Hall in tightly cramped space, which does not allow for efficient work flow or provide any opportunities for department growth.
 - The existing Millennium school is approximately 29,000 square feet in size and presently accommodates the School Administration personnel, which consists of approximately 29 school department employees (primarily School Administration) and 40 SPED students. They currently occupy approximately half of the classroom and office space in the building, there is ample room to accommodate Building Services Department within the remaining space of the Millennium School Building.
 - This would keep the Building Services Department in relative proximity to Town Hall, and lessen the burden for individuals that need to do business with Building Services and Town Hall. This relocation would also provide better handicapped access to Building Services.

- The current school population indicates that the Millennium building would not be needed for school children in the near future.
- Building Services could easily be relocated into the Millennium School with minor modifications and could be separated from School Services by a hallway door. Separate parking on the south end of the building would also be needed, as well as improving the access road around the back of the building.

2- Relocate School Facilities Department, expand Animal Control Department space, and provide indoor storage of Library Bookmobile vehicle at the old Town Highway Department building

- Currently the School Facilities Department is leasing approximately 9,000 square feet of storage space at three separate locations, two at Abbot Mills and a third space at the Franklin property on Bridge Street. They also occupy a town owned garage facility on Town Farm Road adjacent to the George Rogers Fire Station. The School Department spends approximately \$30,000 annually for these spaces. The Abbot Mills was recently sold and will be converted to private residences. Construction is expected to start this year and the School Dept. will need to move out their two spaces.
- Could also allow for storage of bulk purchases for the schools and the town.
- Could provide storage space for school vehicles and allow the school department access to the salt shed in the winter months, as they clear school property during winter storms.
- The Animal Control Department serves other towns, which provide income to Westford. Could allow adequate space for the housing of animals and an area to wash animals and also allow for office space for the Animal Control Department.

- The old Highway Garage Building could be used to storage School Facilities Department vehicles, equipment, and materials and supplies. A bay could be used to hold the library Bookmobile and the last bay of the facility could be converted to space for the Animal Control Officer.
- Existing office space would be used by the School Facilities Department employees and the Animal Control Officer. The attached trailers would be used for plan files of all school buildings.
- The facility has ample space to store the library Bookmobile during the winter months, which was requested by the Library.
- The existing Salt Storage Shed in the rear of the facility would continue to be used by the Highway Department. This was requested by the Highway Superintendent in order to purchase bulk quantities of salt during the off-season at reduced prices. The Highway Superintendent anticipates that a sufficient amount of salt could be purchased and stored at sheds at both the old and new highway garages that would last through most of the next winter. In addition, the Highway Department provides the School Department with salt during the winter. Having both operations in one location would streamline the salting operation for the School Facilities Department.

3- Relocate Recreation Department to former Water Department building

- Currently the recreation department is in the second floor of the old fire station in Graniteville. They have five employees working in approximately 1,000 square feet of space that is also used to store materials used for their programs. Their location is not handicap accessible and does not have any parking. The department is rapidly expanding and continues to add more programs. They need a suitable location for their growing staff and ideally need a space to store all of their recreational equipment in one location.
- Parks and Recreation currently store all of their maintenance vehicles and equipment at the old Highway Garage in a garage bay at the salt storage shed. All of this equipment should be relocated to a dedicated space in the new highway garage.
- The Water Department recently constructed a new treatment facility across the street from the old garage and moved their operation to the new building. However, they still occupy the old building, storing equipment and materials. The old garage has approximately 6,000 square feet of space, including 1,600 square feet of finished office space. This would provide adequate space to house the Parks and Recreation Department current operation.
- There has been discussion that the Water Department still requires this building to service their vehicles. The PTBC believes that these vehicles can be serviced at the new highway garage as that is what the new highway garage was designed for. If in fact the Water Department has another need for this building, we suggest that the Recreation Department be allowed to use some or all of this building for the short term until a suitable long term solution can be found.

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- The relocation of Parks and Recreation to this facility would meet all of their current needs with minimal modifications needed to the building. The existing office and counter space would not need to be changed. A second bathroom may need to be added.
- The garage space could be used to store equipment needed for the programs. Indoor activities cannot be provided in this facility.
- There is ample parking for the Parks and Recreation employees and for the public who visit the facility to register for programs.
- It should be noted that in a letter to the Board of Selectmen from Water Department in June, 2004, the Water Department stated this building could not be used for non-Water Department activities as this building is located within the Zone I of a public water supply and therefore was unavailable to the town.
- Parks and Recreation relocation to the Water Department could be considered a temporary move if they were to construct a new facility in the future that will include office and storage space, and a space for indoor activities. Possible locations for this facility could be town owned land at either East Boston Camps or the Veterans Memorial Complex

- 4- Allow Housing Authority to acquire the former School Administration building on Town Farm Road.
 - The building has been unoccupied since School Administration relocated to the Millennium School in 2003. The building is not handicap accessible and would need significant improvements to the building infrastructure if it were to be reused for town services.
 - The Housing Authority has the ability to seek funding to rehabilitate the building which would be expensive for the town to consider.
- 5- Study the possibility of using the old Fire Station at Graniteville as archival storage for Town Hall
 - The town does not currently have adequate archival storage. Currently records are maintained in the basement of town hall.
 - The Fire Department could relocate its current equipment from the lower section of the building to another location. This could include the School Facilities Department garage behind the George Rogers Fire Station if the school department has relocated to the old highway garage building.

- 6- Though not a zero cost recommendation, construct an elevator at Town Hall and convert upper portion (minus the Town Manager and Assistant Town Manager's space) to a public meeting room
- The town hall, particularly the second floor, does not currently meet the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Massachusetts Architectural Access Board (MAAB) standards for handicap accessibility. In addition, the town needs more meeting space. Converting the second floor back to a meeting room would provide more options for town department meeting schedules, especially the Board of Selectmen.
 - The attached sketches details how the Town Hall could be converted to provide for only the Administration and Finance Departments if Building Services were to be relocated to the Millennium School. The first floor plan would not change significantly from the existing layout. However, the Town Clerk's office would be relocated and a new vault would be added. The second floor would include a new large meeting room, plus offices for the Town Manager, Assistant Town Manager, plus a break room. A communications room could also be provided that would include all of the permanent equipment needed to broadcast public meetings on the cable access television station.
 - Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds could be utilized for a portion of this work under the proviso that the upstairs must be returned as close as possible to its original design.
 - The library could then expand by moving the children's book area into the lower meeting room.

Future Considerations

1. Expand Fletcher Library
2. Construct Fire support station in Parker Village
3. Expand/construct community center to serve seniors and the teenage population of Westford
4. Seek more permanent solutions to Town Hall and school administration space needs